


Mandela Washington Fellow fights corruption by honoring honest officials

Integrity Idol Mali winners pose with Kondo Moussa (fourth from right) and members of the  Accountability Lab (Courtesy of Integrity Idol Mali)

When corruption is exposed, perpetrators are usually publicly shamed and the government loses trust and credibility. Many wonder who else is guilty and if they will ever be caught.

Kondo Moussa, a 2015 Mandela Washington Fellow from Mali, decided to take a different approach to fighting corruption: Have a contest to honor Mali's most honest officials and treat them like rock stars. Moussa had founded the weekly newspaper L'Express de Bamako and was president of the nonprofit organization Giving Back Mali, where he taught leadership skills to young people.

As part of his fellowship, he spent time at the Accountability Lab, which created [Integrity Idol](#), a global grass-roots campaign that celebrates public officials with a proven record of integrity. For the contest, nominees are selected by the public and narrowed down to a final five with the help of an independent panel of experts, culminating in a national radio and television awards ceremony.

Integrity Idol is active in Nigeria, Liberia, Nepal and Pakistan. Moussa told the nonprofit organization IREX that he decided to bring the contest to Mali in hopes of building a national conversation around how to lead with honesty and integrity.

The contest can "create a national conversation about corruption and show the importance of honesty, integrity and personal responsibility in public affairs," he said.


He also felt that focusing on solutions to corruption, instead of the problems, is more effective. Plus, a televised contest honoring integrity would also get people to think more about corruption in their communities.

After five civil servants were chosen for the final in December 2016, the audience voted for military officer Issa Dia as the overall winner. Dia's community initiative LAYIDU provides hundreds of children with venues to learn and play sports together and Integrity Idol said his "devotion to his job and helping his community, as well as his honesty and hard work, make Issa Dia a man of great integrity."

Nominations are already being accepted for the [2017 contest](#), and you can learn more at Integrity Idol Mali's [Facebook page](#). Moussa said he sees his work as "a movement" rather than a set of projects. "We want to help this younger generation of Malians come together and collectively push for the change they want to see. It is a collaborative process, through which we all learn, share, adapt and continue to push for new ways of doing things. That is very powerful," he said.

Accountability starts with you. Join #YALIUnites by taking the pledge at yali.state.gov/unites.

Journalist Brings Positive Change to Nigerian Communities

Oluwatoyosi (Toyosi) Ogunseye 

For years, the steel plant in Lagos, Nigeria, emitted noxious fumes, annoying local residents. So journalist Oluwatoyosi (Toyosi) Ogunseye decided to investigate.

Ogunseye convinced her employer, Punch Nigeria Limited, to pay to test the health of a group of residents. The results of the residents' blood, urine and drinking water tests revealed poisonous metals in their bodies that were developing into cancers, asthma and other ailments.

Punch Nigeria publishes Punch, Nigeria's most widely read newspaper, and Ogunseye's investigation became a three-part series linking the plant's fumes to the residents' ailments.

Soon after Ogunseye's series appeared in Punch, the government ordered the plant closed and allowed it to reopen only under strict new regulations. The plant's owner agreed to compensate residents.

This wasn't the first time one of Ogunseye's investigations sparked positive change. When another story revealed a children's ward in a government-owned hospital was under-equipped, the government bought more incubators for high-risk infants and increased its support of other facilities that serve children. "I like to reveal the story behind the story," she said.

Her experience shows that accurate and fair journalism can make a difference in peoples' lives.

"I went into journalism because of my passion to make positive changes in the society," said the 2014 Mandela Washington Fellow and YALI Network member.

Building a Career in Journalism

In her second year as a university biochemistry student, then-20-year-old Ogunseye landed her first reporting job with the Sun newspapers. One of her first investigative stories was about four students who suddenly died after attending a disco.

Since her first days with Sun, Ogunseye has earned a bachelor's and a master's degree in biochemistry from the University of Lagos, a bachelor's in media and communications from Pan-Atlantic University, and a Ph.D. in politics and international relations from the University of Leicester.

Now Punch's first female editor and its youngest, the 31-year-old has 11 years of experience as an investigative journalist writing about topics such as politics, crime, business, health and the environment. Ogunseye, who lives in Lagos, also teaches media ethics at the Nigerian Institute of Journalism.

An inspiration to the next generation of journalists, Ogunseye advises reporters to observe what their peers are doing well and not so well. "Ensure that your content is better than the competitor's while ensuring that their weakness is your strength."

She advises people who read newspapers, listen to radio or learn about current events online to "consume media responsibly. ... It will give you a balanced perspective of issues."

Ogunseye has received numerous professional awards, including the Knight International Journalism Award for outstanding news coverage that makes a difference in the lives of people around the world and the CNN MultiChoice African Journalist of the Year Award.

She hopes one day to be president of Nigeria. "I believe I understand the challenges of my country," she says.

Media Literacy: Five Core Concepts

They are on your mobile phones and computer screens, in newspapers and magazines, stretched across billboards and broadcast through radio waves. They are mediated messages, and you are inundated with them every day.

With so many viewpoints, it's hard to separate [fact from fiction](#). To guide your exploration of the media that surround you, the [Center for Media Literacy](#) developed these five core concepts:

1. All media messages are constructed.

Media texts are built just as surely as buildings and highways are built. The key behind this concept is figuring out who constructed the message, out of what materials and to what effect.

2. Media messages are constructed using a creative language with its own rules.

Each form of communication has its own creative language: scary music heightens fear, camera close-ups convey intimacy, big headlines signal significance. Understanding the grammar, syntax and metaphor of media language helps us to be less susceptible to manipulation.

3. Different people experience the same media message differently.

Audiences play a role in interpreting media messages because each audience member brings to the message a unique set of life experiences. Differences in age, gender, education and cultural upbringing will generate unique interpretations.

4. Media have embedded values and points of view.

Because they are constructed, media messages carry a subtext of who and what is important — at least to the person or people creating the message. The choice of a character's age, gender or race, the selection of a setting, and the actions within the plot are just some of the ways that values become "embedded" in a television show, a movie or an advertisement.

5. Most media messages are organized to gain profit and/or power.

Much of the world's media were developed as money-making enterprises. Newspapers and magazines lay out their pages with ads first; the space remaining is devoted to news. Likewise, commercials are part and parcel of most television watching. Now, the Internet has become an international platform through which groups or individuals can attempt to persuade.

By considering the core concepts behind every media message, you equip yourself with an ability to analyze and interpret a message — and to accept or reject its legitimacy.

To learn more about these core concepts, download the Center for Media Literacy's [free toolkit](#). The Center for Media Literacy is an organization that helps people make sense of today's complex media environment.

Objectivity in the News

No one approaches any story with complete objectivity. As a reporter begins to research, it is likely that she will have a bias toward some aspects of the story. The goal is to set aside those presumptions and move forward with healthy skepticism.

To learn how journalists can achieve objectivity in their reporting, simply click on the titles below to expand a section and learn more.

Encouraging Diversity of Views

In many countries, a partisan press is the norm. Readers and viewers in these nations expect that a news organization will approach topics from its point of view and select subjects it covers accordingly. They know that competing news organizations may advocate from different perspectives. Opinion columns should be clearly labeled and should neither distort nor falsify.

Journalists should seek diverse voices and competing views. They should support freedom of speech. News organizations should provide forums for robust debate on issues vital to their communities. Letters to the editor and readers' comments encourage public participation. News organizations also

should make every effort to keep discussions civil and discourage falsehoods or attacks on others.

Respect for the Individual

The Society of Professional Journalists' Code of Ethics says, "Minimize harm ... treat sources, subjects and colleagues as human beings deserving of respect." This principle recognizes that a responsible journalist may sometimes harm someone but should make every effort to minimize that damage. The code advises the journalist to show compassion for those who will be affected by news coverage, especially when they get attention through no fault of their own.

Crime victims, relatives of public figures, children and other vulnerable people should be treated with sensitivity.

Intrusive newsgathering can cause harm. Persistence is appropriate, but aggressive tactics cannot always be justified. Although possibly legal, making repeated phone calls, following a person, taking photographs or remaining on private property after being asked to leave may cause distress.

There can be valid reasons to report information that a news subject would prefer to keep secret. A public official may wish to keep secret an extramarital affair. But if public resources are used to support the affair, it becomes a matter of legitimate public interest.

Similarly, crime victims often prefer that their identity remain confidential, particularly in the case of sexual assault. The news media should balance the rights and interests of both victims and criminal defendants with the right of the public to be informed.

Cultural Sensitivity

Journalists should not reinforce stereotypes. They should consider carefully whether it is necessary to identify an individual by race, religion, sexual orientation or similar characteristic. Gender-neutral language often is appropriate.

Reporters should remember to be sensitive to different cultural traditions. For example, adherents of some religions forbid or discourage photographing individuals. On the other hand, "cultural values" can be a cloak for censorship.

The ethical journalist should challenge attempts to suppress the truth, whatever justification is offered.

Other parts in this series include [*The Independent Journalist*](#) and [*Being Accountable to the Public*](#).

(Adapted from an [article](#) published in the *Media Law Handbook* by the Bureau of International Information Programs. Download the complete [Media Law Handbook](#) [PDF 2.6 MB].)
